

Discussions on Amazonia

Excerpts from Amazonia discussions on euro-sappho, December 1995

About maps and locations

Eva:

Originally, Amazonia was all forest, or a white, uncharted space on the map. The very art of mapmaking is historically connected with settling down uninhabited areas and filling them with habitation. Only those parts of Amazonia are charted where there is habitation. There are large parts that will be forever uncharted, as they shall remain unknown and wild.

Deborah:

I had been under the impression that Amazonia was the big place, and for example, the Forest of Melancholia was a subset of the big place (kind of like Denmark in Europe). I had the impression that a place like the Ancient Land, was a distinct region from the Forest of Melancholia. That women in the different regions were connected to a greater Amazonian culture, but with regional differences.

Amanda:

This is the impression that I was under, too, Deborah, but if anyone is under a different impression then I hope there are room for all of them....I would hate to either have to reach a consensus, or have someone define Amazonia for me. I have assumed that the only boundaries are the imaginations of E-S list members...

Eva:

Yes, Deborah, this is quite a perceptive observation. However, there are differences of opinion as to the extent of Forest of Melancholia. The sisterhood of the Forest of Melancholia sees the whole forest covered area as connected to this forest, preferring it to be more of a state of mind that you can have anywhere where a forest grows. Some others prefer to see the Forest as more clearly defined, in just one corner of Amazonia. There are some inhabitants of Amazonia who prefer all their geographies as unlabelled, while others love giving new names to familiar corners.

So, these definitions and names will vary, depending on who is placing what on which map.

About interactive writing

Marlies:

I want to say something [...] about telling stories with more people, and what's more, people that do not confer about how and what is going to happen next. The audience that does not participate in this story telling thing may not notice this, but it is a very precious balance between what the actual writer is telling and what the writers before her have already told and maybe want to tell in future.

So, you not only **write** things, you also have to read very carefully what others wrote so as not to upset the other's story line, characters and general sensitivities. You have to read between the lines and try to adapt to others as well as create your own part, your own style. So, you have to be **very** tolerant in lots of ways to be able to write together for a longer time.

Now, Amazonia is very dear to the writers, and lots of other e-s'ers. It is our playground, also our paradise and our Utopia. When I want to write something about it, I must make sure that I do not disturb someone else's idea of Utopia with my writing. Of course, this happens sometimes, nevertheless. But when other writers send signals that you are upsetting them more or less, or harming their idea of some places, figures etc. (and that means that you are ruining **their** Utopia), you must try to adapt. This is **our** Utopia, one has to compromise from time to time to keep it this way.

This is different from writing on your own, as has happened in other saga's. Then you can situate the story in some safe part of the land which doesn't affect the general idea of Amazonia. You can write as much as you want, as long as you put warnings in headers and don't include real life dykes.

But with a story that is as long running as this one and with so many writers, one has to take others very much into consideration when writing. And that is what was happening when I made Polly instruct the buildings to be torn down. They were doing somebody harm, as could be interpreted from someone else's attribution. They were interfering with the sanctuary idea from which this whole Amazonian city (more specifically the Forest of Melancholia) was created. So how best to solve that **and** save the story by having mother superior tear them down?

So, this is not a question of someone ruling or struggling for power or such nonsense, this is a question of close reading and trying to make amends, of respecting someone else's ideas of how a lesbian amazonian society should look.

The best solution to this kind of meta-story problems is to stick to your own characters (the ones you created or re-created), and/or point of views, so you don't interfere with someone else's plot or story inside the story. And read closely.

Deborah:

Thanks a lot for your really insightful comments about the nature of "Amazonia" and the process of collective writing. The longer I'm on E-S, the more I see the deep commonality between "virtual" and "real" life, and in both cases it is helpful to have more experienced women share their perspective in order to explain that which is puzzling, and also how to avoid pitfalls.

Not having participated in the creative process of the sagas before, I must admit that previously I read them more superficially, without much awareness of the nuances in both the collective process as well as individual visions.

For me, the sagas really exemplify that in a highly diverse world - **without rulers** - where individual fantasy and vision is allowed to blossom, that each participant must have her sensitivity feelers out, and acceptance that another woman's path might not be the same as your own. And to respect the signals (however subtle they may be), and find a workable solution, when one Amazonian expresses that you have crossed a personal boundary (kind of like sex :).

As a novice, I have found myself having to learn to read these signals, interpret and decipher. Is this satire, erotic tales, utopian vision? Is it a dream playground or a spiritual retreat? Does she want to play together, or does she want to play alone? Finding out, that with sensitivity (interpreting the silence as well as the replies), the saga can be all of these things, and give expression to each our unique personas.

And as a novice, and one who tends to plunge into life full speed ahead, I have found myself at times with a red face (what else is new?) - but much the wiser for the lesson. Nothing to do but throw the old ego aside, and welcome the new social skills and heightened awareness.

With this said, what a joy the process has been so far! What a fantastic world of fantasy and vision!